

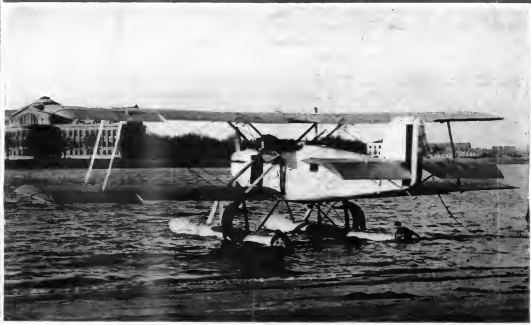
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JANUARY 14, 1924

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XVI

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JANUARY 14, 1924

No. 2

The Battleship and Aircraft

In a number of recent articles naval officers have made the statement repeatedly that "an enthusiast" or "air enthusiast" desire to sweep battleships and rely entirely on aircraft for the protection of the country. With this as a basis of their argument they then proceed to show how impossible this would be in practice. We do not believe that the advocates for aircraft do desire to sweep battleships and in this connection we quote a recent statement of Rear Admiral W. P. Fulmer who has probably taken an advanced position in regard to aircraft as say "an enthusiast." "The water does not advance," he says, "and never has advocated the scrapping of our present battle fleet. It has simply been urged that we have enough battleships; that they are outmoded by modern weapons, that a new type may appear during the next decade, and that every available penny should at this time be devoted to submarines and our bases which are lacking in sufficiency in our fleet."

In fairness, the battleship advocates should not misstate the attitude of the air people in order to create hostility to our air development. They will have cause to regret this attitude if they consider it. Admiral Fulmer who has lived with these naval officers all his life refers to them as "steeped in conservatism, with their brains encased in armor as thick as that of a nation's tank turret, into which a modern idea could not penetrate, with their vision of the naval world and their conception of new weapons limited by the finite perspective of a turret or the narrow slit of a conning tower, they could see and think of nothing and advocate nothing but battleships, battleships, battleships."

Several years ago it was difficult to get a naval officer to admit that aircraft were even to be seriously considered. The classic challenge of Secretary Daniels to "Admiral" Mitchell, as the General was called by him at that time, well always mark the end of denial period. Since then and after the battleship bombing tests, the word "adapted" has become the most used to use in connection with aircraft. This is a direct advance and comes very close to being the exact truth as far as the development proposed by the Navy is concerned. But the next point to be argued is how much should be spent on the "adapted" in proportion to naval expenditures. We mention that \$12,000,000 to \$15,000,000 will not be enough even to protect the fleet, not to mention the offensive use in which aircraft could be employed.

What is to be done in an order amount of money being spent to strengthen battleships whereas the same amount spent on aircraft might produce greater results. As Admiral Fulmer again states "Today we still find ourselves without the naval weapons which should have been provided in 1909. Only several days ago the proposition was revived after it had been buried under a load of logs, to spend from \$4,000,000 to \$10,000,000 in mangling gun barrels to elevate their guns and

to add blast and plaster to our battleships in vain attempts to defend them against submarines and air forces."

Aircraft proponents do not want battleships scrapped but they do want an air force which will be able to defend the fleet and then if it can be demonstrated that bombs and torpedoes can do what it is believed they are capable of accomplishing it will be time enough to get into a discussion of the relative power of battleship fleets and aircraft fleets.

Our Wanting Air Policy

COMMENTING on the speech of the Duke of Sutherland at a dinner party tendered in his honor, Representative Roy G. Fitzgerald, of Ohio, looking ahead in Congress at aviation development as a most important aspect of national defense, stated as an illustration with a representative of the Washington Star, that the United States, with similar military or civil air policy, is exposing a great industrial area to bombing attacks by airplanes taking off from a hostile fleet beyond our coast defenses.

"The United States has no military air policy," Representative Fitzgerald complained. "Our great industrial area is within the radius of action of present day bombing airplanes launched from a hostile fleet lying off our coasts. The lack of a proper military air policy leaves this area undefended from hostile air attack." "While, in 1920, Congress passed and the President approved an act giving to the Army Air Service control of all aerial operations from land bases, neither aircraft nor personnel nor facilities adequate for the defense of our coastal areas have been provided the Army Air Service. Apparently Congress has been bewildered by the continued request of Naval Aviation for shore stations dotting our coasts, and because of the depletion of the resources assigned the Army, appeared in such installations, has refused to provide adequately for either service."

"This situation, apparently in due order to the admission or location of the War and Navy Departments, who maintain, despite the will of Congress, a good policy which not only provides but directs operations by naval aircraft from shore stations. It is apparent that Congress must speak so plainly that our military services will no longer disregard their expanded will and when Congress speaks it should authorize and appropriate for the Army Air Service personnel and money sufficient to secure the adequate defense of our coastal areas."

"It is believed that our warlike in the development of commercial aviation transportation is due not to the hesitancy or to the lack of enterprise of the American people, but to the failure of Congress to provide regulatory laws."

Representative Fitzgerald's views on our wanting air policy should be of freely interest to Congress.

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